

# LATINO AMERICAN COMMISSION

ESTABLISHED IN 1972 | FALL 2013 NEWSLETTER | WWW.LATINOAC.NEBRASKA.GOV



**Mission Statement:** The mission of the Latino - American Commission is to serve as a voice in the Nebraska State Government for Latino Americans/ Latinos.

**Vision Statement:** The vision of the Latino - American Commission is to empower the Latino Community through a pro-active approach to issues that affect their access to educational, political, economical and social opportunities in Nebraska.

## 2013 Hispanic Heritage Month Commemoration

The 7th Annual Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration took place on Friday, October 4, at the Capitol Building in Lincoln, Neb.

The Commemoration, hosted by the Nebraska Latino American Commission (NLAC) and sponsored by McDonald's, Southeast Community College, U.S. Bank and Wells Fargo, began with a ceremony in the Capitol second floor Rotunda at 3:30 p.m. where instrumental Latin music performed by *Marcos y Sabor* of Omaha welcomed an audience of 200 people.

First Lady Sally Ganem presented the Proclamation signed by Governor Dave Heineman observing Sept. 15 to Oct. 15 as Hispanic Heritage Month in Nebraska.

Carl Eskridge, Lincoln City Council Chair, gave the Welcome to the audience and Opening Remarks were provided by Roger Garcia, Executive Director of El Centro de las Americas in Lincoln. Seven Nebraska students, two organizations and two community leaders were honored at this year's Commemoration. NLAC Director Dr. Lazaro Spindola served as emcee.

This year was the second Commemoration where award recipients were nominated by the public. Yolanda Nuncio, Chair of the NLAC Board of Directors presented the awards to the four recipients:

- Hugo Arellano, Bilingual Hispanic Liaison of Lincoln Public Schools, was awarded the Humanitarian Award for his dedication to helping more than 500 people in the community with access to education and resources.
- Athena Ramos, a Program Coordinator at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, was honored with the Inspiration Award for her work in tobacco control initiatives among the Hispanic and immigrant community, which includes founding the Latinas, Tobacco, y Cancer community-based program in Omaha.
- The Organization Award was granted to the Multicultural Alliance of Hastings, a new cross-cultural organization serving as a resource and community center in Hastings. Among their services, they have offered meals and ESL classes to immigrants and refugees, collaboration on the Homeless Project and are currently

*(Right) Dr. Sergio Wals, Keynote Speaker for the 2013 Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration, addresses the audience with advice based on his research and experiences in Nebraska.*



working on a community mural project.

- The Event Award was given to El Centro de las Americas of Lincoln for their event, "Dia de la Independencia Festival" held in early September. The free family-friendly event brought the community together and promoted Hispanic heritage through music, food, and dance while providing educational resources to the public-at-large.

The Keynote Speaker was Dr. Sergio Wals, Assistant Professor in the Dept. of Political Science at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

Dr. Wals told the audience about his background and experience as a Mexican immigrant coming to Nebraska to work at UNL and his reflections based on research of immigration and heritage in state's history.

"It is my duty to warn my fellow Americans that the social balance involving questions of race and ethnicity, the us versus them mentality, needs to be under constant reflection," he said.

A public performance by Latina ballerina Chloe Watson was presented after the Keynote speech on the Rotunda floor. Watson, of Colombian descent, performed a contemporary dance choreographed by Erin Alarcon, of Ecuadorian descent, who created the special piece to signify one's pride of their heritage. The performance and commitment of the dancers were courtesy of Ballet Nebraska, the state's profes-

*Continued on Page 5*



Lazaro Arturo Spindola  
NLAC Executive Director

## Latino American Commission Commissioners

**Yolanda Nuncio (Chair)**

**Chandra Diaz-DeBose (Vice-Chair)**

**Chabella Guzman (Secretary)**

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**Jack Gutierrez**

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**Gisella Muñoz**

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## NLAC Staff

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**Dora Lima**  
Staff Assistant

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# A Message from the Executive Director

Happy Holidays,

Fall has come and gone very quickly this year, especially with all of the events the Commission has presented or participated in these past few months.

Our Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration was bigger this year, which is why our coverage of the event takes up most of this newsletter. We also held another successful Latino Summit in Kearney, you can view some photographs on the last page that shows a glimpse into what the Summit provides for students. The *Día de los Muertos* event at the Sheldon Museum of Art grew tremendously this year, and will be bigger next year. We hope you caught a viewing of "Nebraska Stories" on NET that featured a 10 minute long segment on the holiday celebrated in Lincoln and Omaha. Our very own Public Information Officer Jasel Cantu helped coordinate the segment to ensure educational accuracy and help NET with their needs. It is still available for viewing online.

We have included photos of *Día de los Muertos* celebrated around the state this year, there is not enough room to show every image, but that is a good thing. We want more people and organizations to celebrate this wonderful holiday that teaches the public about the culture. We expect more celebrations in 2014.

As for the future, we are getting ready for the 2014 Legislative Session that begins on Jan. 8, 2014. We are working on legislation regarding Human Trafficking, education and benefits that will help the Latino population. If there is a particular issue or Bill you are interested in, or feel that we should be involved in, please let us know.

Stay safe and warm this Winter,

Dr. Arturo Spindola - Nebraska Latino-American Commission Director

**National Hispanic Heritage Month**

**My Community**

Have you ever seen a group of people who help and take care of each other? Well, I have. They are members of the Latino culture. Today, I will be talking about how they strengthen my community.

They support the community in many ways possible. For example, they help their own neighbors move in, take part in social events, help in community service, and take part in traditions. They also have a big part in our community. They help and participate in social events in the city. They make amazing food that is served at Hispanic town events. Some of these wonderful events include food like tamales, chiles, and tamales.

They host many events related to their culture and heritage. Some include Cinco de Mayo, Las Fiestas, Quinceañeras, Las Mañanitas, Día de los Muertos, and Día de los Reyes. They have many parties to celebrate these holidays. They work in many ways to celebrate these holidays. They work in many ways to celebrate these holidays. They work in many ways to celebrate these holidays.

Mayra Moreno participates in the Oregon Trail Days Kiddie Parade in Gering, Nebraska on July 12, 2013. Children were invited to dress up as anyone for the Parade, and Mayra dressed up as a world-famous Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. The wagon she rode in was decorated with paper skulls, flower petals, and bright colors to honor Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, a popular holiday in Mexico observed on November first and second. Photo courtesy of the Scottsbluff Star Herald.

**National Hispanic Heritage Month** was enacted into law on August 17, 1988 by President Ronald Reagan observing September 15 to October 15 as a period to celebrate the histories, cultures and contributions of those who can trace their ancestry to Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America.

September 15 was chosen as the beginning of Hispanic Heritage Month because it is the anniversary of Independence for the Latin American nations of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. Additionally, Belize, Chile and Mexico also celebrate their independence days during this period on September 21, September 18 and September 16, respectively.

**McDonald's® and Wells Fargo HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH ESSAY CONTEST**

**Congratulations to these statewide winners:**  
Fatima Arroyo, Jordyn Glaze, Trevor McKeone, and Denisse Navarro-Perez

Each winner was presented with awards and read their essays at the Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration held in the Nebraska State Capitol Building on October 4, 2013

**CONTEST WINNING ESSAYS**

**How Latino Culture Strengthens My Community**

During my summer vacation I was observing the celebration of a town home in Mexico. While volunteering, I was going to make a difference. I was a man who had lost his mother, and I was going to make a difference. I was a man who had lost his mother, and I was going to make a difference. I was a man who had lost his mother, and I was going to make a difference.

**A Stronger Foundation**

During my summer vacation I was observing the celebration of a town home in Mexico. While volunteering, I was going to make a difference. I was a man who had lost his mother, and I was going to make a difference. I was a man who had lost his mother, and I was going to make a difference.

Not only has Latino culture brought families together, but it has also inspired the education of all ages. Many students who come into the Lexington Public Schools system have not yet learned English. Many people from outside of Lexington wrongly judge students after their first few weeks. They feel the students need to work harder. Sadly, they do not realize just how hard these students truly do work. All of my Hispanic friends have shared how they want to be the first ones in their family to graduate high school or go to college. This very goal drives many students to learn the English language in less than a year. They work even harder to catch up on their class. These students often work after hours to help everyone to learn their English. In some cases, they work after hours to help everyone to learn their English. In some cases, they work after hours to help everyone to learn their English.

Moreover, Latino culture has opened our eyes to a new perspective on life. The cultural diversity in our community is truly a gift. Growing up in Lexington I was immediately introduced to several different races. From the perspective of a child I already thought everyone was the same. It was not until I was older that I realized that there were differences. All Latino culture has opened our eyes to a new way of life. It has shown me that it does not matter what background we come from, the color of our skin, or the clothes we wear, we are all the same. We are all connected in one way or another.

Latino culture has strengthened the foundation of Lexington in many ways. Not all communities have the privilege of interaction with a large population of Latinos. Whether one experiences a single Latino family or a whole town, simply opening our eyes and looking deeper into the world around us can change our lives for the better.

**John Mark Shields**  
Lexington High School, Lexington, Nebraska  
Hispanic Heritage Month  
2013 Essay Contest First Place Winner

McDonald's served as the newest sponsor for the Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration this year, and among their prizes was the publication of the winning essays from the Hispanic Heritage Month essay contest. The first place essays were printed on tray liners and distributed to every McDonald's in Nebraska. The photograph that appears on the tray liner was taken by the Scottsbluff Star Herald newspaper and printed with their permission. The photo is of Maya Moreno participating in a kiddie parade in Gering, NE. To request a tray liner, please send a request to Jasel.Cantu@Nebraska.gov.



# NLAC Photo a Finalist in NCLR Photo Contest

An NLAC photograph has been selected as one of 10 finalists in the 2013 Affiliate Photo Contest presented by the National Council of La Raza (NCLR).

NCLR is the largest national Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States with a network of nearly 300 affiliated organizations, of which NLAC is one of two affiliates in Nebraska.

The Annual Affiliate Photo Contest provides NCLR with an opportunity to showcase the efforts and impact the affiliates bring to the community.

"We are excited to be a finalist for the photo contest, and proud that our work is being showcased nationally with NCLR," said NLAC Executive Director Dr. Arturo Spindola.

After an internal review process, the Commission's photograph was chosen as a finalist from a record-setting amount of submissions nationwide.

The photograph is of Emily Hernandez, a junior attending Lincoln East High School, proudly singing the national anthem at the 2013 Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration held at the Capitol Building on October 4, 2013.

Hernandez is an enrolled member of the Ioway Tribe of Nebraska and is of Mexican descent. She was representing three nations at the Commemoration: the Ioway nation, the United States of America and the nation of Mexico.

"Our photo is different in that it shows cross-cultural bridging and multiculturalism. We have a young Nebraska student who is giving back to her community by volunteering her time and talent by singing the national anthem. We believe that this image is an accurate and positive reflection of the United States of America and Nebraska," said Dr. Spindola.

Hernandez's pride in her multiculturalism is reflected in the photo, says Bethany Schmidt, the Commemoration volunteer who took the photograph.

"I think the photo shows pride," said Schmidt. "I think the photo represents the pride and excitement of the whole Latino community."

Schmidt, 21, is a Political Science and Journalism student attending the University of Nebraska at Lincoln (UNL). She currently works as a designer for the *Daily Nebraskan*, the UNL student newspaper, and as a page layout designer for the *Clear Water Express Evening News* newspaper.

She volunteered to take photographs for the Commemoration while working as an intern at the Nebraska Indian Affairs Commission, which is located next door to NLAC.

"I am really excited. I really liked that photo and I'm glad Emily is recognized as well," said Schmidt.

"It was a lot of fun, when I cover events it's really standard but this



*Emily Hernandez (above) sings the national anthem at the 2013 Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration in the Capitol Building on Oct. 4th. In the background stands NLAC Director Dr. Spindola, Mexican Consul Jorge Espejel Montes, and McDonald's representative Andrew Bucknor. The photograph is a finalist in the NCLR 2013 Affiliate Photo Contest.*

one was lively. Emily was singing so beautifully and she's so passionate about her heritage."

As a finalist, NLAC will compete for one of two grand prize packages, which include a ticket on Southwest Airlines, a ticket to the 2014 NCLR Capital Awards in Washington, DC, and a free Android Phone.

"We are not the only ones who will benefit from this Contest," said Dr. Spindola. "Emily has been a positive role model for young people for years and we are proud that she is being recognized nationally, she deserves it."

"We are also happy that this honor is an opportunity to help the aspiring career of a UNL student who took photographs at the event, and are grateful to our friends at the Indian Affairs Commission for introducing us to both Emily and Bethany."

Schmidt expects to graduate in May 2014 and plans to pursue a career in a human rights field with a focus on indigenous rights. If the photo wins, she will use the award for her portfolio and resume.

The winner will be selected by popular vote on the NCLR website. The public can vote everyday for the contest until Dec. 22, 2013.

The winning image will be used in NCLR promotional materials and their website.

Please visit and vote at:

[http://www.nclr.org/index.php/nclr\\_affiliates/program-entry/affiliate\\_photo\\_contest/](http://www.nclr.org/index.php/nclr_affiliates/program-entry/affiliate_photo_contest/)

# Hispanic Heritage Month First Place Essays

## A Stronger Foundation

By: JohnMark Shields, 10th Grade  
Lexington High School

During my summer vacation I was allowed the privilege of volunteering at a care home in Mexico. While volunteering, thinking I was going to make a difference, Ricardo, a man who had lost his voice, opened my eyes to the world around me. However, I did not need to travel to a foreign country to learn this lesson. It took only a simple walk outside my own house.

Latino culture strengthens the foundation of the Lexington community in several ways. It has developed our understanding of family, inspired better education for all ages, and opened our eyes to a new perspective on life.

Latino culture has enriched families all over the Lexington community by becoming examples for those around them. During one of my high school classes, we were talking about our home life and defining our dinner table. Almost all of the Hispanic students stated how they always come together as a family before eating. Hearing all of these great stories about eating with the whole family including grandparents sparked something in me and many other students.

As simple an idea as it was, we began to see how much closer eating together could bring our families. This personally brought me to try and connect to my grandfather, who had distanced himself from our family. Most of us have not spoken to him in over ten years. Later that same year, I had the privilege of meeting with him for the very first time.

Not only has Latino culture brought families together, but it has also inspired the education of all ages. Many students who come into the Lexington Public Schools system have not yet learned English. Many people from outside of Lexington wrongly judge students after their first few weeks. They feel the students need to work harder. Sadly, they do not realize just how hard these students truly do work.

A lot of my Hispanic friends have shared how they want to be the first ones in their family to graduate high school or go to college. This very goal drives many students to learn the English language in less than a year. Then they work even harder to catch up on their class.

These students' drive and work ethic have inspired everyone to work their hardest, to never give up on their goals, and to always do their best no matter what barriers come along. Overcoming these obstacles has taught Lexington to be thankful. Also, we have learned that no matter where we begin on the starting line, we all have the ability to finish the race as fast as we can. Now, Lexington citizens are working harder than ever, reaching for the skies, and pursuing our dreams.

Moreover, Latino culture has opened our eyes to a new perspective on life. The cultural diversity in our community is truly a gift.

## How Latino Culture Strengthens My Community

By: Ashley Roemmich, 7th grade  
David City High School

Have you ever met a group of people who help and love everyone they meet? Well, I have. They are members of the Latino culture. Today, I will be talking about how they strengthen my community.

They support the community in every way possible. For example, they help their new neighbors move in, take part in social events, help in community service, and take part in town elections. Their culture has a big part in our community. They host and participate in soccer games in the park. They make amazing food that is served at fiestas and town events. Some of these wonderful events include food like maize-based dishes and homemade salsas.

They host many events related to their culture and heritage. Some include Cinco de Mayo, Las Piñatas, Quince Años, Las Mañanitas, Día de los Muertos, and Día de Todos los Santos. They have many parties to celebrate these holidays.

They work in many places in the community like the grocery store, the car wash, factories, schools, and the hospital. They enjoy what they do and greet customers with a smile. The Latino culture strengthens my community in many ways, but one of the main ways is through religion. They are mainly Christians, but some may have other religious beliefs. Latino religious groups provide social and emotional help for the community. They also participate in community volunteer service projects.

Latino culture strengthens my community in many ways. Some of these ways include hosting and participating in social events, participating in community service events, and providing valuable goods and services through jobs they have in the community.

My community is a better place because of contributions made by Latino culture.

Growing up in Lexington I was immediately introduced to several different races. From the perspective of a child I simply thought everyone was the same. It was as if there were no differences at all.

Latino culture has opened our eyes to a new way of life. It has shown me that it does not matter what background we come from, the color of our skin, or the obstacles of life we must go through. We are all the same; we are all connected in one way or another.

Latino culture has strengthened the foundation of Lexington in many ways. Not all communities have the privilege of interaction with a large population of Latinos.

Whether one experiences a single Latino family or a whole town, simply opening our eyes and looking deeper into the world around us can change our lives for the better.



# Hispanic Heritage Month Continued...



*(Top) The Multicultural Alliance of Hastings receives the 2013 Hispanic Heritage Month Organization Award. Founder Sandy Sypherd and Alliance members traveled to Lincoln to receive the award.*

*(Above) El Centro de las Americas was the recipient of the 2013 Hispanic Heritage Event Award for their Dia de la Independencia Festival held in September. El Centro's Director Roger Garcia and Festival beauty pageant winner received the award.*

*(Below) Essay Contest winners, from left to right: JohnMark Shields, Jordyn Glaze, First Lady Sally Ganem, Ashley Roemmich, Fatima Arroyo, Denisse Navarro-Perez and Mexican Consul Jorge Montes.*

*(Below Right) NLAC Director Spindola welcomes First Lady Sally Ganem who presented the Hispanic Heritage Month Proclamation.*



sional dance company. The event concluded with the recognition of the winners of the Hispanic Heritage Month Essay Contest, which was open to students in grades 6 to 12 with the theme "How Latino Culture Strengthens My Community." The essays were judged by a blind jury of 13 teachers, businessmen, and community leaders from across the state, and winners selected by the Hispanic Heritage Month State Commemoration Planning Committee.

All of the winning students attended the ceremony with their families and teachers. The first place winners were invited to read their essay to the audience.

Out of over 250 entries, the winners in the high school division were, from first through third place: JohnMark Shields, Trevor McKeone and Jordyn Glaze, all of Lexington High School. In the middle school division, the winners were, from first through third place: Ashley Roemmich of David City High School, Fatima Arroyo of Schuyler Middle School and Denisse Navarro-Perez of Brownell-Talbot School in Omaha, Neb.

Both first place winning essays are published on Page 4.

This year's Overall Honorable Mention distinction went to Dalia Chavez of Norfolk Catholic Jr./Sr. High School of Norfolk, Neb. and Sharon Lin of New York City, New York.

The ceremony was closed by the First Lady who shared her own experiences growing up with diversity in Omaha. A reception immediately followed at the Capitol Building's Dining Hall where a buffet of Latin food was served to guests.

"This year's event was larger than last year's and having representatives and students together under one roof is wonderful," said NLAC Director Dr. Arturo Spindola. "We had students from Lexington, Schuyler, Norfolk, Omaha and David City, many who had never been to Lincoln before and community leaders from Hastings, Lincoln and Omaha all together meeting the First Lady and each other. We had performances by gifted Latino artists who donated their time today. This event is an accurate reflection of Hispanic Heritage Month."

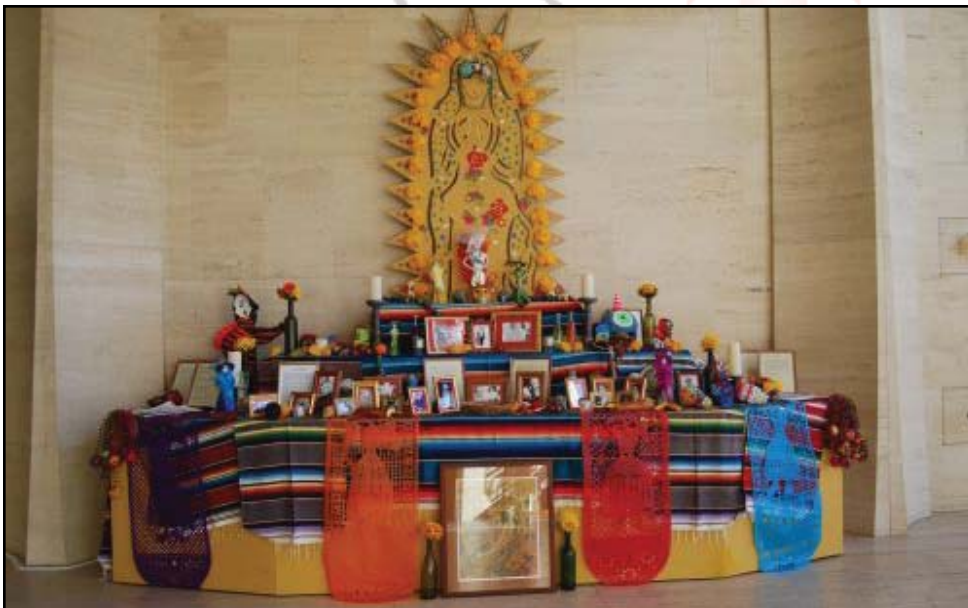


# Pieces of Nebraskan Hispanic History

## 2013 Dia de los Muertos Celebrated Across Nebraska



Omaha celebrated a citywide celebration that included community ofrendas and presentations at Plaza de la Raza, House of Loom, EL Museo Latino, Creighton University, Mexican American Historical Society of the Midlands, and more. (Above) Celebration coordinator Athena Ramos stands by her family ofrenda. (Left) Justice for our Neighbors set up an ofrenda honoring those who have passed while entering the country. (Below Left) A large community ofrenda set-up by the Nebraska Folklife Network was exhibited at the Sheldon Museum of Art in Lincoln with photos of Latino community leaders. (Below) The Multicultural Coalition of Grand Island organized a Day of the Dead 5K Run & Fiesta. Shirts were sold to commemorate the event.





## Upcoming Events

- **Audition: December 7 & 13**  
'Las Hermanas Padillas' - Center for People in Need, Lincoln, 402.474.2206
- **Deadline: December 15**  
HSF General College Scholarship
- **Deadline: December 22**  
Voting for NCLR Photo Contest online
- **Holiday: December 25**  
Christmas Day
- **Holiday: January 1**  
New Year's Day
- **Deadline: January 15**  
Gates Millennium Scholarship
- **Meeting: February 22**  
NLAC Quarterly Meeting - Lincoln

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[www.pinterest.com/nlacommission](https://www.pinterest.com/nlacommission)



## 2013 Latino Summit



The 2013 Latino Summit took place on Oct. 28th at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney, Neb. The Summit was presented by the Nebraska Dept. of Education and NLAC.

(Above) College representative Cristina Lamas speaks with students about the various degrees offered at Bellevue University. Representatives from UNK, UNL, UNO, and EducationQuest are getting ready to speak with students.

(Left) Mary Ann Losh with the Dept. of Education introduces the Student Panel during lunch. Left to right: Facilitator Oscar Rios and UNL students Benito Sanchez and Natalie Dones.

(Bottom Left) Over 600 high school students are getting ready for lunch.

(Below) An Educator session facilitated by NLAC Chair Yolanda Nuncio and Latino/a educators Jose Lara, Mariana Cruz, Maria Guerrero and Ita Mendoza.